Charlie's Studio, Berlin 2009

Charlie Isœ

THE ORIGINAL DRIFTER

"SO IT'S ALL BEEN DONE BEFORE. I DUNNO IF IT HAS. SAYING WHAT IT'S ALL BEEN DONE BEFORE HAS BECOME AS MUCH A CLICHÈ AS RECKONING WHAT IT HAS. IT CREATES THE TEMPTATION TO SMASH IT ALL, TEAR IT OFF THE WALLS AND START AGAIN. BUT ISN'T THAT, TOO, A CLICHÈ ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT IT WE'RE FUCKED... AT THE END OF THE DAY AREN'T PAINTINGS JUST SOMETHING YOU HANG ON YOUR WALL TO MATCH THE COUCH"
- CHARLIE ISOE IN 2006

If the definition of a street artist doesn't only involve the protagonist invading public spaces through his art but actually implies living on the streets, then Isoe's portrait should grace every dictionary. Christopher Charlie Isoe was born in Perth, Australia and is currently living in Berlin... well, if he's not hitting the streets for another road trip that is. His pictures are sharp observations of everyday life where people are often captured in a state of extreme ecstasy or deep resignation while being juxtaposed with comical figures or ornamental structures. His art is expressed through a mix of oil pencils, spray paint and emulsion paints that draw a lot of comparisons, from Egon Schiele's nude portraits to Bill Plympton's sense for the grotesque. Charlie's first European solo-show 'Will Be Home Late-Leave The Light On' can be seen at Berlin's Circleculture Gallery 'til April 11th.

UNTITLED 1, 2009
Technique: oil, acrylic, charcoal and spraypaint on canvas / courtesy of Circleculture Gallery & the Artist

UNTITLED 3, 2009

Charlie, to start with, what brought you to Europe and to Berlin in particular... is it the old story of cheap rents and that kind of artistic *sturm & drang* vibe the city offers?
I'm not sure, really. I've always travelled a lot, I guess. I moved around a lot as a kid, I changed schools so many times... I never went on a school camp, I wish I had. I left school at 15 or 16, and I lived alone in Europe when I was 16. I broke my left foot three times when I was about 20 which sort of forced me to come home. About these recent adventures... I just got the urge. And that was that. It happened pretty quickly, actually. I sold everything I owned. Quit my job, left my girlfriend, gave my dog away... and I left. About Berlin in particular, I don't know, maybe the weather? It wasn't really a conscious decision, it just sort of happened. When I arrived here I was exhausted and pretty broke. A lot of my gear had been rolled by junkies in Eastern Europe, and I didn't have the energy to keep moving. I'm not tied to being here, but Berlin is an interesting place, there is a huge amount of history here, it's an old city, and you can feel that in the buildings and the streets. There is some amazing art and it's cheap to live here. You can live by the skin of your teeth. The supermarkets are easy to pinch food from too.

How important was it for you to attain a degree in Fine Arts in Australia in your early twenties, after you'd been living a life on the road for a couple of years already? Reading your biography, that degree almost seems to be the last time you played by the rules of society...
To be totally honest, the university wouldn't give me my papers or my final marks because I owe them money, so I just assumed that I had a degree. Making a CV is creative writing... one is allowed a little bit of artistic license if it helps to get a foot in the door. I can, however, credit the whole university thing with giving me three years to develop while the government pays (a little) allowance.

Your paintings are heavily influenced by your personal observations... would you say that you're trying to be as neutral as possible, as if you pictured it through a lens, or did the process of reflecting about what you just saw kick in naturally?
I don't think it's possible for a person to be neutral, and I don't want or pretend to be. It's not my intention to paint literal representations of exactly what is in front of me, rather they are interpretations, sometimes extrapolations of a situation. My paintings are just my two cents...

In which way do your travels influence your paintings?
I think most aspects of my life influence my work in some way or another, and certainly travel has been a part of my life. I'm interested in exploring different cultural contexts. I draw a lot from my experiences and observations, and my interpretations of them, and I've seen a lot of things on my travels. I've learnt a lot about people, and myself, and human nature to some extent. There have been some hairy situations, a few rough times, and a lot of good times.

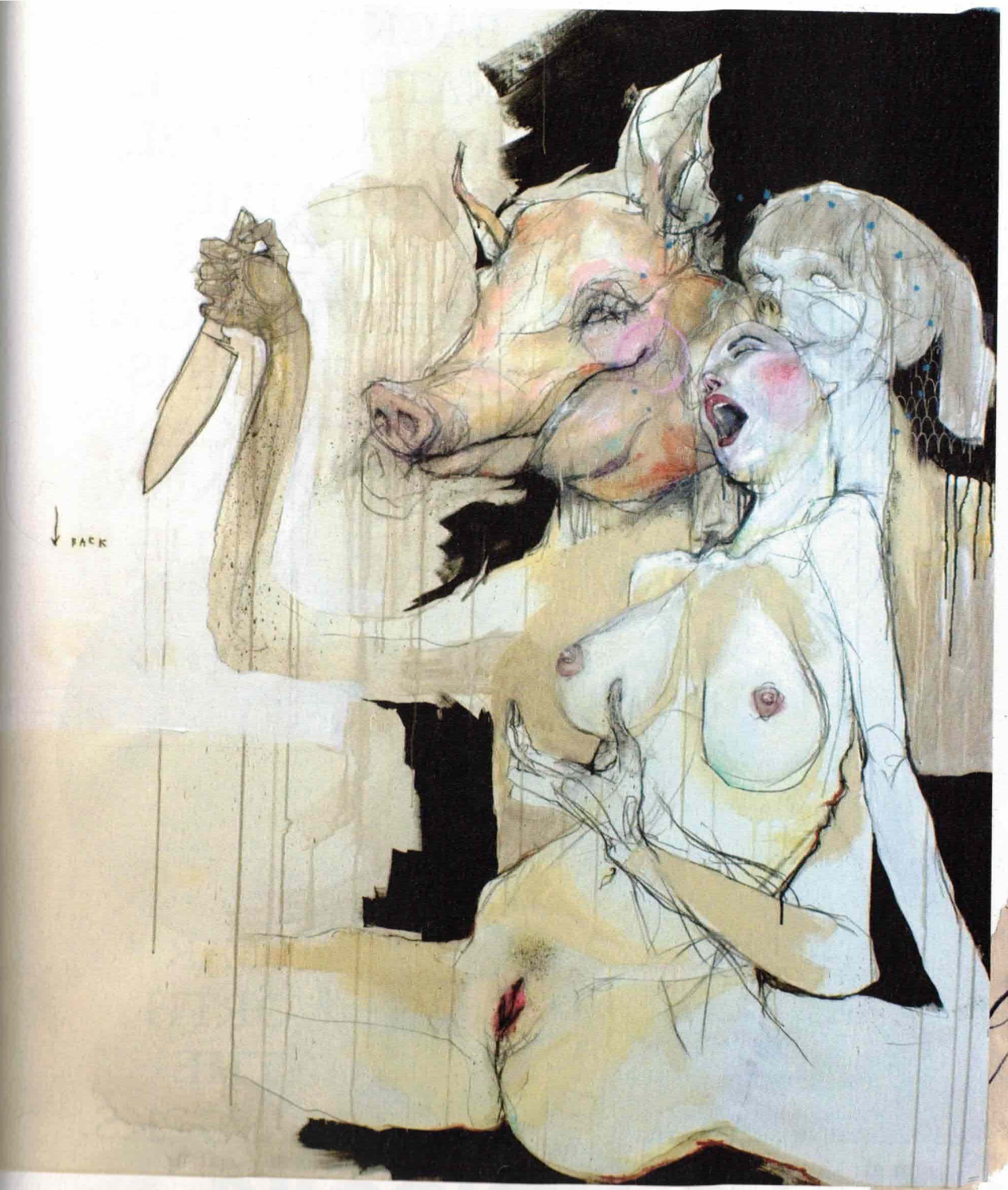
Skateboarding certainly changes the way you look at a city... it becomes sharper and you develop a sense for architecture and space. Would you say that this goes for graff as well?
Well, skateboarding has definitely been an influence in my life. In the way that it changes how you look at things around you... maybe you notice how a tree root has pushed up a bit of concrete that looks fun. So has painting outside, it prompts you to explore places you might not go to otherwise, and I think it makes you not only notice, but appreciate things that some people might overlook. You become increasingly aware of the certain subtleties and dialogues that exist, and for me that is a certain sense of intimacy with a city.

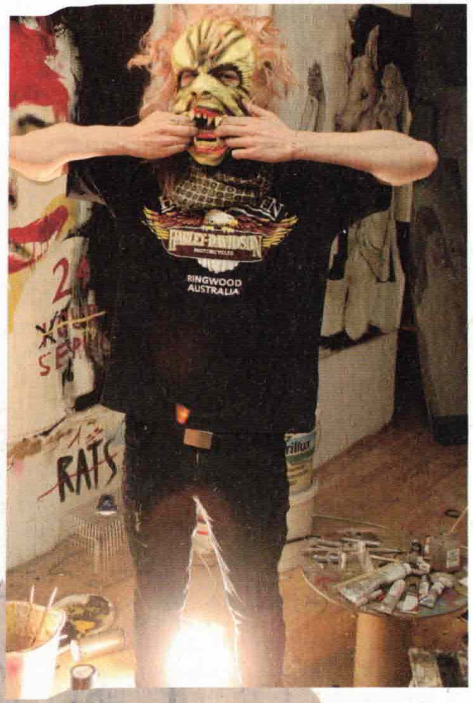
Why did it actually take so long to come up with your first solo show in Europe?
How long is it supposed to take?

What's next for Mr. Isoe?
One foot in front of the other.

www.charlieisoe.com
www.circleculture-gallery.com

words: Forty
pics: Foley





HE WAS A DANCING MAN (JUDAS), 2009

Technique: oil, acrylic, charcoal and spraypaint on canvas

Charlie Isoe Interview,
Lodown Magazine, Issue No. 65, Mar/Apr 2009.

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THE ORIGINAL
DRIFTER

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